

Dear Senator Williams, Senator Looney, Representative Donovan, Representative Sharkey, and Members of the Human Services Committee:

I am writing to oppose SB 1012, which would destroy the efficient coordinated services provided by the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) to children and adults, who are blind. Presently there are many programs, which are interdepartmental. One program, which I co-chair, is an in-service program for classroom teachers who have students who read large print. This program takes place every October and is well attended by classroom teachers throughout the state. Last October sixty-five teachers attended the in-service and here are some of their comments:

- I valued the whole hands on experience. It really hit home what this child deals with everyday. Thank you.
- I valued the advice from the teachers as well as showing us technology and materials to use to make our students academic lives easier.
- I valued all the hands on activities.
- I valued the active participation, truly understanding the limitations and struggles.
- I valued the organization and quality of the day. Fabulous in-service!
- I valued the information I received about the process and support of BESB.
- I valued the panel discussion...great insights into the realities of life as a visually impaired citizen of the real world.
- I valued being able to see what some of the visual issues actually feel like.
- I valued the true obvious dedication of the BESB staff. I valued the whole workshop.
- I valued that each consultant and TVI was very knowledgeable approachable, and informative.
- I valued getting my specific questions answered.

In order to successfully run this program I enlist the help of not only the education consultants but also staff from the low vision center and vocational rehabilitation. This in-service has been so successful and well attended that we have planned to have it for two days instead of one, which would allow even more teachers to attend. One of the days would focus on elementary school age vision related issues and the second day would focus on middle school and high school vision related issues. My question to the appropriations committee is if Children's Services is transferred to the BOE and Adult Services is transferred to DSS, will this and other BESB programs still take place and where?

BESB also provides training for classroom teachers with students, who read braille and for paraprofessionals. These in-service programs are also interdepartmental including library staff, adaptive technology staff, and vocational rehabilitation staff. All of the fall in-service programs for teachers and paraprofessionals have taken place since before 1984 when I joined the BESB staff. It would be a disservice to teachers and paraprofessionals in the state of Connecticut to no longer be offered these valuable programs.

I also co-chair the interdepartmental technology committee at BESB, which provides informative programs on the latest devices to students, parents, teachers of the visually impaired, and vocational rehabilitation counselors. If SB 1012 passes these programs will also cease to exist.

I urge you to oppose SB 1012 which will shutdown valuable and much needed programs. BESB should be allowed to continue to provide efficient, coordinated, and outstanding services as an independent stand alone agency as it has been since 1893.

Respectfully,
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